

# Policy Brief

## THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: BETWEEN EXTERNAL PRESSURES AND EUROPEAN DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

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The Republic of Moldova is simultaneously a frontline and a laboratory of Europe's hybrid war.

The central lesson drawn from Moldova's experience is that actors engaging in complex threats operate with shorter decision–operation cycles than public bureaucracies, and thus delay becomes a vulnerability.

Moreover, resilience to diverse threats and shocks cannot be improvised it must be built through education, media literacy, institutional cooperation, and international partnerships. In the coming period, the primary vulnerability lies at the intersection between energy insecurity, information manipulation, and economic resilience. The most relevant indicator of success in countering disinformation is not the number of people reached, but rather the behavioral and cognitive resilience of citizens the point at which hostile narratives no longer trigger panic, mobilization, or behavioral change.

### ● THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA – A LABORATORY UNDER HYBRID FIRE

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has been subjected to a recurring mix of energy coercion, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, illicit financing networks, and political pressure. Episodes of gas supply cuts and price shocks have been accompanied by narratives portraying European integration as “economic suicide” and Russia as “the only reliable partner.”

In 2022, these tactics nearly destabilized the government, sparking street protests and panic buying; in 2024–2025, they have re-emerged online particularly on Telegram seeking to revive public anxieties and erode trust in pro-European institutions.

The state's response began to accelerate. The development of the Center for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation (2023), adjustments to the mandate and coordination of the Information and Security Service, the professionalization of strategic communication, and the increased

involvement of the EU and NATO, including through EUPM Moldova, mark a paradigm shift: from slow and fragmented reaction to more coherent cooperation. However, structural problems persist: underfunding of public communication, fragile judicial reforms, fragmentation of the information space, and territorial asymmetries in regions such as Gagauzia and Transnistria.

## ● KEY LESSONS: AGILITY, INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING, AND TRUST

**The first lesson** concerns the time-agility dimension, where hybrid actors operate with superior speed, exploiting hesitations caused by procedural constraints. The Republic of Moldova has learned that any communication vacuum is quickly filled with rumors and conspiracy theories; therefore, inter-institutional coordination, real-time risk assessment, and proactive public communication must become security instruments, not merely public relations tools.

**The second lesson** demonstrates that resilience is built, not improvised. Investments in education and civic identity, combined with critical thinking programs, media literacy initiatives, and community networks grounded in trust, reduce the population's susceptibility to manipulation. Counter-messaging campaigns on Telegram and fact-checking initiatives are showing cumulative effects: citizens who understand manipulation techniques become significantly more resistant to instrumentalization.

**The third lesson** concerns the overcoming of stereotypes, confirming that small states are indeed capable of generating strategic impact. The practices developed by the Republic of Moldova in documenting influence operations, managing active disinformation campaigns, tracing financial flows, and mitigating energy constraints represent public knowledge goods with European-level applicability.

Ultimately, ***the final lesson*** underscores that technology cannot replace democratic legitimacy: in the absence of transparency and public accountability, technical instruments systemically fail. In a context marked by the emergence of artificial intelligence, the intensification of economic coercion, and the instrumentalization of environmental risks in strategic domains of competition, an anticipatory paradigm - rather than a reactive one - must become a core principle of national and European Union security policies.

## ● RISK PRIORITY: THE INFORMATIONAL INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF ENERGY

If European partners were to treat a single vulnerability as an absolute priority this winter, it should be the “energy + information” nexus. Energy coercion remains the most effective hybrid weapon combining unpredictable delivery decisions, volatile pricing, and narratives that translate economic discomfort into political distrust.

The effectiveness of the response is not purely technological; it is both technical and psychosocial. At the operational level, strategic energy buffering — through the creation of reserves, short-term backup contracts, and joint sharing mechanisms with Romania and Ukraine helps mitigate the objective risks of supply disruptions and market volatility.

At the cognitive–communicative level, transparent public campaigns explaining price formation, support schemes, and energy-saving options, supported by local networks of credible communicators (responsible institutions, local administrations, teachers, opinion leaders, etc.), reduce the likelihood of energy panic. Combined, these interventions reinforce public trust and democratic legitimacy precisely at the points targeted by information warfare.

### ● **ECONOMIC COMPONENT – RESILIENCE TO COERCION AND SHOCKS**

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The economic dimension of resilience is treated as inseparable from the informational one: energy price shocks translate into inflation, burden households and SMEs, and fuel hostile narratives.

The Government Program 2025 outlines an economic framework focused on growth and competitiveness, aimed at strengthening resilience to shocks and coercion. The government intends to leverage the €1.9 billion package to finance tens of thousands of businesses, attract investments (including from the diaspora), and stimulate exports, while ensuring a predictable fiscal policy and

access to long-term capital. Accordingly, the program seeks to reduce dependencies through energy interconnections with the EU and Romania, investments in generation and storage, and the diversification of logistical routes. It also prioritizes support for local producers, the development of short supply chains, and the modernization of state-owned enterprises to increase efficiency.

In this context, **economic measures must be complemented by transparent public communication reducing pressure channels, strengthening trust, and reinforcing public confidence, which are all essential for European integration.**

### ● **THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA – BOTH A WARNING AND AN INSPIRATION**

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The Republic of Moldova stands as both a warning and an inspiration: a warning about the increasing sophistication of modern hybrid warfare, and an inspiration for how democracies can adapt and endure. In the period ahead, the absolute priority lies at the “economy + energy + information” nexus, while the true measure of success is behavioral resilience the moment when hostile narratives no longer alter what people do or believe.

The affirmation of Moldova’s resilience in the face of hybrid threats is not merely a national security objective; it represents a European public good, whose strengthening is vital for regional stability.

In light of this perspective, the strategy for strengthening the state requires a multidimensional and interconnected approach based on three critical pillars:

Stabilizing and diversifying the economy, along with transparent financial management, are indispensable for reducing vulnerabilities to economic coercion and countering illicit financial flows used for political subversion.

Strengthening institutional capacity, including cyber defense and crisis management, enables a rapid and coordinated response to complex hybrid tactics, from cyber attacks to institutional infiltration. Institutional agility is vital to integrate early warning mechanisms and align legal reforms with EU and NATO security requirements.

An informed and manipulation-resistant civil society is the first line of defense. Strategic education and effective communication are essential to cultivate citizens' ability to resist propaganda and counter external disinformation. This protects the integrity of democratic processes and strengthens public confidence in the face of efforts to erode social cohesion.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the resilience of the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the post-electoral period, becomes a barometer for the effectiveness of the European Union's collective security efforts. Its success depends equally on national commitment and on sustained strategic support from international partners.